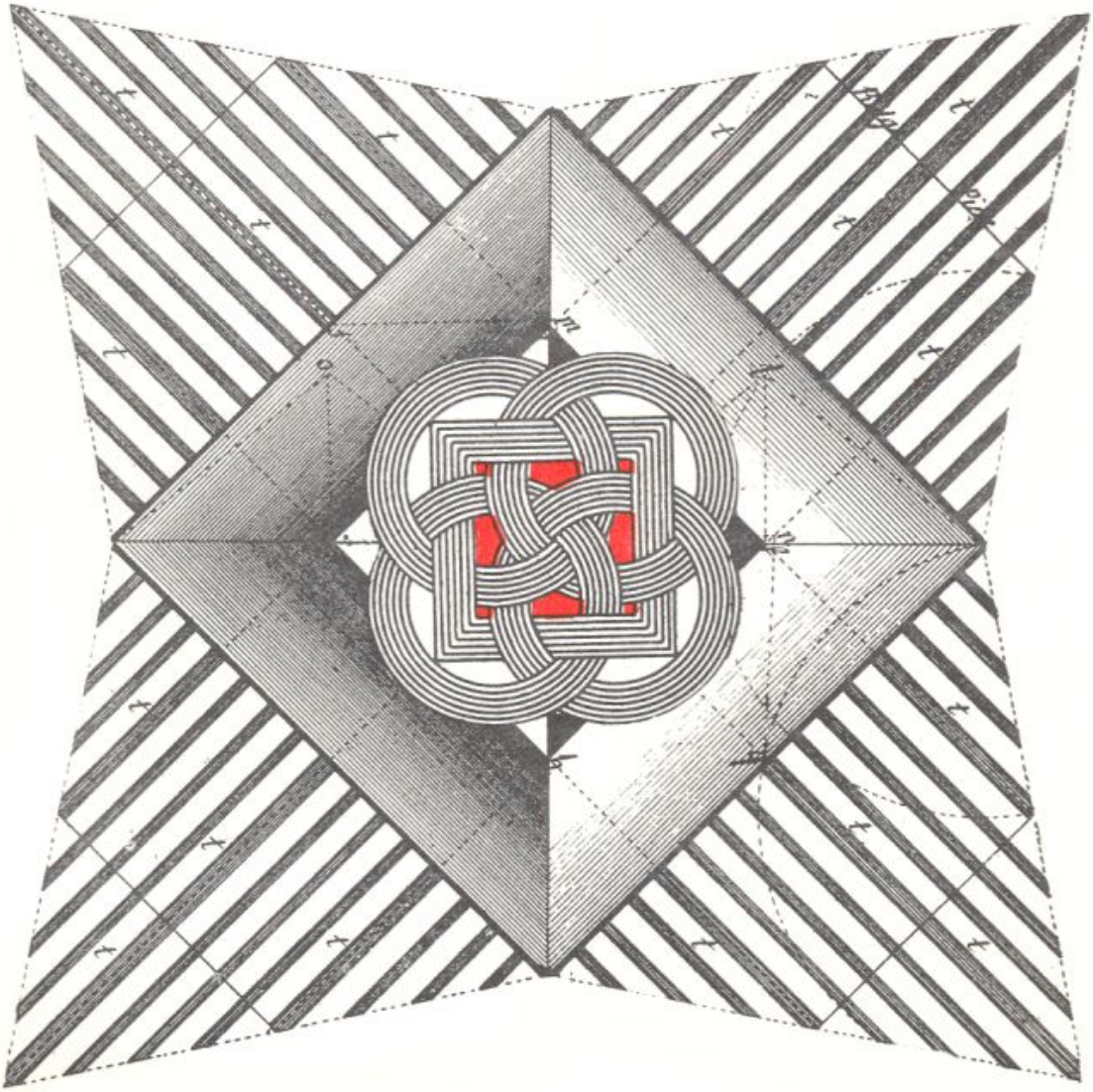
RESTORATION REVIEW

Leroy Garrett, Editor

June, 1973 Volume 15, No. 6



The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one. – *Thomas Campbell*

Volume 15, No. 6 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **June 1973**

The Church of Christ: Yesterday and Today . . .

THE ONENESS OF THE CHURCH

We believe in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church.

This pungent line from the Apostles' Creed has been the basis of our study of the church's holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. We conclude this series with a close look at oneness as part of the church's necessary character.

The collage on the front cover, created by Talmadge Minter of Abilene, Texas, gets us off to a good start, for it symbolizes the unifying nature of Christ's work in our lives. Disparate lines and diverse squares point to the inevitable differences within human experience. But out of this comes interlocking circles, typifying that fellowship can be enjoyed by all those who are in Christ, despite their differences. The source of it all, however, is in the unifying blood, which was shed to make men brothers. Talmadge's original piece demonstrates this so beautifully, which cannot be captured in a reproduction, for he has a transparent plastic cover sheet, which, when lifted from the rest, leaves the central square and the interlocking circles *without* the blood.

It is a lesson that goes much deeper than artistic interpretation to lift the plastic cover and see the unifying blood disappear from the picture. It points to the difference Jesus makes. Societies of various kinds, whether the Masons or Oddfellows, interlock lives in a kind of fraternity, but it is only in Jesus that men become brothers by being children of God together. "You who were once far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility," says Eph. 2:14. And the apostle adds, "He came and preached peace to you who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."

That is what it is all about: *peace*, peace with God and with each other. It is a simple and beautiful truth that Jesus came to make men brothers, and in doing so he made them one. "In Christ the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). The beauty of organic oneness is also expressed by the apostle in these words: "God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another" (1 Cor. 12:24-25).

The quotation on the front cover also speaks to the thesis of this essay, and its insight may be more far reaching than appears at first reading. "The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one." It was not necessary for Campbell to use the lower case "c" on church! What he sees as important is the necessary oneness of the Body of Christ. By God's intention and by the very nature of His revelation the church

is one. It cannot be other than one. This can only mean that no sect or faction can be His church. All party names and creeds, with their attending institutions, can only be cancerous blights upon the Body of Christ. We may be divided into our various parties, but the Church of Christ itself, by its very nature, can only be one. As Campbell went on to say, the church is composed "of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obey him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians."

This quotation is remarkably close to what the Apostles' Creed says about the church. By its very nature it is one and cannot be otherwise; it is holy in that it is composed of those who bear likeness to Jesus in their tempers and conduct; it is catholic in that it is made up of "all those in every place" that turn to Jesus; and it is apostolic in that it is rooted in scripture.

So both the Apostles' Creed and Thomas Campbell emphasize two disturbing truths about the character of the church. Its necessary oneness and its essential holiness or Christlikeness. We say *disturbing*, for this emphasis is an indictment upon the modern church, which is all too content to remain divided into sects and parties, and which bears more likeness to the carnal world in terms of its values and attitudes than to the lowly Jesus.

Campbell is so blunt as to say that a people content to be divided cannot be the church; neither can they truly be Christians unless they are like Jesus. And the old fathers that created that great line that we have made the theme of this study realized that unless the church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic it is the church in profession only.

Our separations are presumably due to doctrinal differences, and yet in all of scripture there is no justification for disciples dividing for such a reason. In view of all the factions, one would suppose that the Bible is replete with admonitions to leave the errant in order to remain faithful. But one looks in vain for such an idea. No believer is ever told to separate from other believers, nor is any group within a congregation urged to leave in order to start a *loyal* church.

To the contrary separations are deemed sensual (Jude 19) and divisions are placed alongside such sins as fornication, idolatry and sorcery (Gal. 5:20), and when one recalls that even in scripture these three sins were sometimes met with *execution* the immensity of its wrongness comes home to us. Jesus himself wrote to the seven congregations of Asia, and while there was a great deal wrong in those churches he never suggested that the faithful leave and start over, even though there are references to such ones. Rather he would say: "Remember then what you have received and heard; keep that, and repent" (Rev. 3:3). What they had *heard* was the gospel of Christ, and what they had *received* was the Holy Spirit. So here we have the *modus operandi* for the disenchanted in

our churches. Remember the Christ of the gospel and hold fast to the blessings of the indwelling Spirit. Going out and starting "a faithful church" only compounds the problem and sets the stage for still another division when another unhappy group emerges.

The passages used to justify divisions simply do not apply. 2 Cor. 6:17 is one: "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord." But this does not mean to come out from among believers, but from pagan religion, from the temples of Venus and Jupiter and from satanic worship. The same context asks: "What agreement has the temple of God with idols?"

About the only scripture that can be brought up for separation on *doctrinal* grounds is 2 John 9-10. But this is clearly talking about the false teacher who denies Christ. There are *deceivers* who deny that Jesus is the incarnate son of God (verse 7), and these are the ones, who, when they bring such teaching, are to be turned away at our door (verse 10). This cannot be made to apply to *sincere* believers, who, though they may be wrong about some things, are committed to God's will like the rest of us.

The exclusivistic spirit that has so long cursed us with compound fractures was evident even in the apostles *before they received the Spirit of truth.* In Mk. 9:38 they complained to Jesus: "Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us." This is the essence of partyism, for it says one must be *of us* to be right, regardless of the quality of his life and work. Jesus did not go along: "Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us."

This is like saying to the Twelve: "Where did you get the idea that following *you* is the basis of fellowship?" And this is what Jesus says to any church that supposes it has all the truth or that acts as if all the rest of us must be "of them" to be acceptable to God.

Despite our differences the Holy Spirit seeks to draw every believer into fellowship with all other believers, and all believers into fellowship with the Father. 1 John 1:3 shows this to be the purpose of the gospel: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." The gospel brings us into a horizontal fellowship with each other, and in turn a vertical fellowship with God. It would follow, then, that the closer we are all drawn to the Father the closer we are drawn to each other.

John goes on to say: "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (l John 1:6-7).

"Walking in darkness" may well refer to what we are talking about the rejection of a brother and the perpetuation of divisions. There is no indication that it has reference to being in error on some point of doctrine. It rather goes to the very heart of what Jesus

came to do: *to make men brothers.* John goes on to say: "He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still. He who loves his brother abides in the light."

So "walking in the light" is loving and accepting your brother. "Walking in darkness is the opposite of this. This is how Jesus walked in the light, loving us and accepting us and dying for us. This means that we can't be within God's fellowship as sectarians, for in rejecting those brothers that are not of our party we reject the fellowship of the Father.

But we must not belabor the point. It is generally admitted that the church is necessarily one and that sectarianism is a horrid evil. It may be more important to deal with practical suggestions whereby our sad state of affairs can be corrected. Much depends, of course, on the will of the divided churches to do something. Complacency is our worst enemy, coupled with the pessimistic view that our divisions are irremediable. For this reason we must continue to insist that the prayer of Jesus for the oneness of his church can be realized.

In thinking of practical solutions we must first get settled what we mean by unity. If unity is doctrinal agreement and conformity on virtually every point, then we have but one way we can go, and that is for all of us to conform to someone's interpretation. This never has been (including earliest Christianity) and never will be, and if this is what we mean, then it all becomes a dead issue. Unity is not possible. We will continue competing with each other, continue rejecting each other, and continue in our divided state, with each of us supposing that everybody else should conform to our way of seeing and doing things.

But if unity is union and communion, made up of diverse elements that are joined together by "a core of faith" that is centered in a Person, then we can have hope for success. We can then be one and still be different, with each having his own uniqueness in Christ. It is like marriage, which could never be if the oneness that marriage implies allows for no differences. Unity in diversity is the only unity the church has ever had or ever can have. If this principle is accepted as valid, then we have a place from which to start. With this granted, let us go on to list some of the conditions we can move toward, in a practical way, in realizing the oneness of the church.

1 . There will be an acceptance of and a concern for all those everywhere that are in Christ. We will cultivate a love for those that are "there" as well as with us.

2. We will be more concerned with that "core of faith" that makes men brothers, belief in and obedience to the gospel, and less concerned about doctrinal differences. This is not to minimize doctrine, but only to recognize that honest men do differ in their interpretations, and that these are matters that can be "talked out" while we go on and accept each other as brothers.

3. There will be an interchangeable membership, so that a brother can move from one congregation to another upon no condition but that he is a disciple of Jesus. There will be no "tests of fellowship" made, for that will be left to God, and it will be an accepted fact

that congregations can be different in organization, methodology, and worship and still be Churches of Christ. This is to say that a member can select a local church, but a local church cannot select its members.

4. There will be an interchangeable ministry that will allow the offices of the church to function freely, with no lines drawn. We need badly to hear men of different backgrounds and to be exposed to new ideas. True, due to understandable differences, a church may prefer preachers of their own background (black ministers for black churches, for example), but there can still be a wide-ranging visitation of evangelists, elders, and others among all congregations. It should be an easy thing for a preacher to move from a non-cooperative church to a cooperative one or from an instrumental music church to an acappella one.

5. Differences and preferences may well keep us apart without separating us as brothers. A brother may have such a view toward instrumental music (or premillennialism, the Sunday School, or big congregations) that he would be uncomfortable elsewhere, but still he will acknowledge others as his brothers and will look for opportunities for sharing the common life in Jesus with them. “Service unites” is an important principle, and we must find ways to work together in blessing mankind. There can be common projects, and shared meetings, even if not the major services of the congregation.

6. Since the Lord’s Supper is the highest expression of fellowship there is, we should seek for those opportunities where “inter-communion services” are possible. Believers should be able to do this even when their views differ about it. If Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot (a party that sought to murder tax collectors) could sit together with Jesus for the first communion service, then we should find ways to bring our disparate people together in such holiness. —*the Editor.*

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THE POWER OF RELIGION

Holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. - 2 Tim. 3:5

The apostle is describing *difficult times* that were to come, or *perilous times* or *times of stress.* One ancient writer uses the same Greek word to describe an ugly wound, and it is found in Mt. 8:28 in describing the demoniacs that Jesus met among the tombs: “so *fierce* that no one could pass that way.” So in 2 Tim. 3 Paul is speaking of fierce times that were to come upon God’s people, and as we look at the description we can suppose that he has well nigh described every generation since his time.

If we chose one word to summarize what the apostle is speaking of, it would be secularism. This is the worldly spirit that assumes man has no need of God, with all its attending evils. The secular man draws his strength and sufficiency from himself and from society, and if religion has any place at all it would be in form only. A secular age moves on as it will, as if there were no God at all. Secularism itself becomes a religion when men are led to believe that their problems can all be solved through science, industry and technology. Anything supernatural is rejected on the grounds that it is "contrary to reason."

Paul points to the subtler form of secularism in referring to folk who hold on to "the form of religion," which they might well do with adamant loyalty. They continue to profess religion, exercising its forms, rituals and ordinances. This is the real peril to which he refers, that the church itself would become godless in spite of its profession. That the world will have the worldly spirit is to be expected, but fierce times are indeed upon us when those who profess godliness cannot be distinguished from the world in either their values or their manner of life.

Thomas Campbell showed keen insight into the nature of the church, not only when he insisted that it is "essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one," but also in observing that the church is made up of those who believe in Jesus and who obey him in all things according to the scriptures, and that "manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians."

Campbell is saying that the *true* Church of Christ upon earth is not only a people who profess godliness but who are really spiritual. And if they are not godly in their tempers and conduct they are not the Church of Christ!

The apostle himself gets close to this view when, after describing the spiritual depression, he urges the believers to avoid such people. He seems to write them off as being of any value whatever to the Cause, and he indicates that fellowship is not possible when people deny the very power that lends meaning to religion.

This will really change our thinking about the church if we accept the promise that Christ-likeness is its essence. And yet it is here that religion has its power. "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13) is a value that can be held only by one in whom Jesus really lives. To those Philippians the apostle could write: "that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (1:10-11).

If this is the real nature of the church, as Campbell insisted, then the pattern of Jesus must be emphasized more, with less stress placed upon forms and doctrines. Forms and doctrines may well be commands of God and are of course important, but as commands of God their intention is to serve as *means* to an end and not to the end itself, for the end must always be Christ-likeness. The important thing about the Lord's Supper, for instance, is not

so much whether it is served, or the when and the where, but whether it is truly a fellowship in the Spirit between believers who are conformed to the image of Jesus. Sound Bible teaching is of little real value if it is not intended to edify the church and to make people more like Jesus. Study for its own sake is likely to produce self-righteous snobs.

The mission of the Spirit to the church is to make it more and more like Jesus. “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Here is the power of religion. A life changed by Jesus, and that changed life becoming more and more like him, and this by the power of the indwelling Spirit. We have a similar thought in Eph. 1:18-19: “Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might.”

The vast resources of power that are in Jesus can be manifest in us who believe! The church must come to see that *this* is what makes it the Body of Christ, and that regardless of its pretense in terms of numbers, budgets and real estate such profession is meaningless if the power of godliness is not evident. This is really the power of changed lives. Jesus makes a difference, and he must make a difference in the lives of those who profess to be his followers.

This is all the more evident from the negative side of the picture: in that catalogue of godlessness that Paul gives as the very antithesis of what religion should mean to mankind. Here, for instance, are those *artificial* resources of power that a secular world looks to for its strength. The catalogue begins with selfishness. “Understand this,” he says to Timothy, “that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self.” This is probably under the guise of religion, and it refers to that attitude that makes self the central and leading object of living. And what poverty this is! Men full of self obviously cannot be filled with Jesus. And they miss the whole point of religion as expressed by our Lord: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). How vain it is for man to look to his own resources for strength, and to direct even that paltry power only to his own concerns!

Then there is money. *Men will be lovers of money.* Here lies the peril of secularism, where a man’s worth is measured mostly by his possessions. Even prosperity is seen in terms of material wealth. Wisdom, goodness, justice are values that hardly rank at all, unless they can be measured in some monetary way. Shakespeare’s “He who steals my purse steals trash” is empty idealism in such an age as ours, for one’s purse is everything, the good name that the poet wanted to exalt notwithstanding. Paul is referring to covetousness, not to a moderate desire for funds to live a decent life. And covetousness he

sees to be idolatry (Col. 3:5). Nothing will so deaden religion than for people to be allured by the power of money, a power that is grossly uncertain and temporary.

Next comes those sins that suggest a haughty and brutal use of power, which of course are destructive of the power of religion. *Men will be proud, arrogant and abusive.* Such people are really weaklings who in their desperation for a place to stand will browbeat others. They assume a superiority that they realize they do not have. People who try to boast and bluster their way into power and eminence are to be pitied, and they are about as far from the spiritual resources of strength that are in Christ as people can get. Unfortunately the proud and the arrogant are to be found in the church as much as in the world.

The list goes on almost interminably, spelling out those sins that make us most unlike Jesus and rendering our religion powerless. Disobedience to parents and disrespect for all that is holy are included, and these are despicable because they are centered in self-will. So with ingratitude, that blind sin that supposes no indebtedness to either God or man. "Without natural affection" points to man's capacity to become inhuman in his dealings with others, while "implacable" refers to a harshness and hardness of mind that knows no mercy and that is bent upon embittering all relationships. For "slanderers" Paul uses the word *diabolos*, which is the word for devil, and surely we are more like Satan than we are like Jesus when we indulge in the assassination of one's character.

The "profligates" are those who have no strength against the sins of the flesh, *incontinent* as some versions render it. The "fierce" are those who have lost the last touch of gentleness and kindness and have become harsh and severe. Jesus makes one tender and loving, and it is the absence of his Spirit that makes one rough, brutal and cruel. "Haters of good" describes that morbid state in which a man has no desire to associate with those who are decent. He has lost all taste for the true, the good, the noble. In the cheap life he has chosen he has even come to hate all that is good. The "traitors" are those who would not only betray friendship for personal gain, but would even collaborate with the enemy in turning fellow disciples into the hands of those who would persecute them.

The awful catalogue of godlessness wearies us, perhaps because we can see flickers of ourselves therein. But we need to study such sins, the awful sins that separate us from God and that render religion powerless. He goes on, for instance, to refer to those who are "reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." Here is *proud* power running amok. Swept on by impulse and passion, man recklessly pursues his selfish goals as if he had no destiny but a few fleeting years in this world. He is so 'swollen with conceit that his only perspective is his own importance. In pursuing carnal pleasures he is but making his own wishes and desires the point of living. It is intended that man come to know God and enjoy him forever. There are those pleasures that

embellish the mind, strengthen the body, and thrill the spirit. It is a tragedy that man is bent upon following those pleasures that stifle soul growth.

Now we have the context in which the apostle alludes to that power in religion that is for us all. After this frightening list of sins, which gets too close for comfort for us, he goes on to say that such ones "retain a form of religion but deny its power." Looking back over the list one is amazed that such people are religious, that indeed they hold on rather vigorously to a profession of godliness with all its forms.

This is to say that they are loyal to the orthodox creeds, whether written or understood, and they go through the correct rituals and conform to the proper doctrines. They carry out the right movements, whether going to church or reading the prayer book, and they support the institutions and agencies. They *hold* to all the forms of religion, and even use the dignity and reputation of religion as a way of satisfying their swollen egos. After all, the religious context is excellent for the arrogant use of power, for proud and abusive treatment of others, and for the fierce, reckless, and implacable attitudes toward change.

Such ones know nothing of the dynamic of love in religion. They do not know how to appreciate the power of a life changed by Jesus. They do not realize the difference that Jesus can make. They are void of the Spirit, wholly unaware of the power of a Spirit-filled life. Seeking refuge in an unimpeachable orthodoxy, they are offended by the notion that a man's life can be so changed by Jesus that it affects every waking hour and gives him such a view toward people and things as to revolutionize his entire value structure. Orthodoxy insists that religion is not to be taken so seriously, certainly not to the point that it invades every facet of one's public and private life.

But this is the power of re1igion that we must recover in our time —*the dynamic power of the changed life.* Religion has left most of our people unchanged. Jesus has made no real difference. Such is bad religion —or it is but the form of religion. And those who get caught up in the form will often reach the place where they do not merely neglect but even *deny* the power of religion. That is Paul's description in 2 Tim. 3:5. Such ones were not merely neglecting the real dynamic of religion, but *denying* such power. This they must do. so long as they choose pride, arrogance and self-satisfaction. The power of religion is far those with empty hearts that can be filled with Jesus. We all know how easy it is to have a head full of scripture and a heart empty of the Spirit. The dynamic of religion is for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

The forms of religion never really convert anybody. We might convert a man to the right church, or to baptism, or to a set of doctrines, or to our party. But there is no way to discount the power of the changed life. This is the gospel demonstrated, and the Bible assures us that this is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). Orthodoxy can be dead and stifling, leaving thinking people to suppose that religion might be all right for kids and nice old ladies. Ah, but the old proud, sinful life that is touched by Jesus and

renovated by his Spirit! There is all the difference in the world. When despair turns to hope. When boredom turns to joy, When coldness turns to. love. When law turns to grace. When insecurity turns to peace. When the form of religion reaches out and touches reality. When Jesus becomes real. Ah, what a difference!

The power of religion is, of course, many things. It is coming to know God through His revealed Word. It is feasting upon the scriptures, as a hungry man feeds upon bread. It is the fellowship of the saints, where the resources of power are a matter of mutual sharing. It is drinking of the Spirit, whereby one is filled with such fruit as love, joy and peace. It is praise and prayer and meditation, for here one draws near to the very font of all power. It is service to others. It is in suffering and weakness, for here God's power is often manifest.

But the crux of it all is Christ-likeness. The power of God is what men saw in Jesus. It was his Person that changed lives. It was his Being that accounts for the church. It was the presence of the Son of ,God that led the self-sufficient Peter to exclaim, "I am a sinful man!" and that caused that sick woman to resolve that she would find wholeness if she could but touch the hem of his garment.

His power will be manifest in our lives to the degree that we open our hearts and allow him to dwell within. His Spirit dwells within, filling us with the fruits of righteousness and making us more like Jesus. And this is what it is all about. True, our Lord has given us forms, and these are to be prized, but they are always to be kept as means of glorifying Christ in our lives and never as ends in themselves.

To be like him, that is the power of religion. When men see Jesus in us they will be exposed to. the same dynamic that shook the Roman world to its foundation. Pilate was disturbed enough in the presence of Jesus, but Nero was hopelessly confused to find thousands in his empire that bore the likeness of Jesus, people who, could not be robbed of their joy even in the presence of death in the Colosseum.

"For me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21), this is the secret of the power in Paul's life. He could even say: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

And that power he would wish for each of us: "My little children, with whom 1 am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" (Gal. 4:19). —*the Editor*

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CONCERNING ANTI-CHURCH RAPS

I thought of entitling this essay *Why I believe in the institutional church*, but that is a thesis for another time. I can say in passing that I believe in established religion because I am an heir of so many blessings that it has bequeathed. The Bible is one. Fuss as we will

about organized religion, it was the great heroes of the church who created and preserved the scriptures, and that not without persecution unto death. There is also great literature and art, and even civilization itself. It was the church who gave us Knox and Calvin and Zwingli and Luther and Savonarola and Campbell and Lipscomb. And even more, it is established religion that has given the world "the salt of the earth," rank and file believers such as read this journal, people who are such a tremendous personal blessing to me.

I may criticize the church, but my quarrel is a lover's quarrel. I love the church for what she has been, is now, and shall be. Her nature is such that her hardy sons will ever be seeking to reform her, and so her most gallant leaders have always been reformers. The church is always growing ugly cancers and is always in need of surgery, and yet she has always produced the very sources for her self-cleansing. Her reformations have always been from within, staged by her own children, never from without and never by those who leave her.

But my thesis here is of a different sort, though related, and it grows out of my concern for an emerging negativism among those who would reform the church. This is especially evident in house churches and prayer groups across the country, where such meetings are often allowed to degenerate into anti-church raps. And sometimes it is even worse, for some people, now separated from the church or having severe problems with their congregations, issue forth in bitter harangues and acrimonious protestations against "the establishment" and everyone connected with it. They show little or no hope for the churches they represent, and they now look with disdain at their former associates or at those they are now criticizing.

I recall one such brother in a southern state that had driven some distance to one of my mini-meetings in a home. He had actually come for an anti-church rap session, and he had plenty of rapping to do, all negative. He wanted us to "give 'em hell" for the way he and others were being treated. He would have been pleased if our session had been a hearing of our mutual woes, afflictions and deprivations. I had no difficulty in understanding what he had been through, and of course I was sympathetic, but I could not believe that his was a Christian response.

I told the group of a house church of our people in San Antonio who met mostly to pray. Men and women would get on their knees and pray lovingly for their elders and preachers, the very ones who were giving them such a hard time in their efforts to be free in Christ. They were continuing to attend their various congregations as peacemakers, seeking God's will in a difficult situation, where some had been removed from the eldership and others had had classes taken from them.

I told of the sister in California who was "fired" from everything when she became charismatic and finally withdrawn from. Even so her letters were love letters, her prayers were full of hope and grace, and she kept right on going among them, loving them more

than ever. I told of the couple in Kansas who were deprived of their rights in the congregation because of what their son-in-law believed, but who kept right on being dynamos of love, kept on believing, kept on smiling, kept on working. This couple too has a house church going, along with their congregational attendance, but the meetings are permeated with love, peace, and joy and attracts a lot of youth. But they are not anti-church raps.

This kind of talk made our brother all the more uncomfortable. He insisted that the brethren he was dealing with could be treated in no such way, for it would be casting pearls before swine. I suggested that part of our problem could be wounded pride. The very idea of treating me like that! There I am the best teacher in the church and they'll not let me open my mouth! They won't even call on me to lead a prayer! And at one time I was one of the top cats, everyone looking up to me as somebody.

And how about Jesus? How did the church treat him and how did he react? When he returned to his hometown for a visit at the synagogue, they not only eyed him with suspicion, reminding themselves that he was once one of the boys about town, but they finally tried to kill him, especially when he began to talk about racial prejudice. But Jesus didn't swell up with wounded pride. He kept right on with his visits to the synagogues, always loving, always believing, always hoping. And when the church leaders finally delivered him up to the Romans to be crucified, even then there was no anti-church rap or soliloquy. He did not open his mouth with one word of complaint. He prayed for them, with no taint of self-pity or self-righteousness, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Our brother did not buy this kind of talk. Jesus never encountered the kind of thugs there were back at his church! And they were far beyond the hope of any prayers. "Come out from among them and be ye separate" was what his Bible told him to do, and off he went, concluding that my meeting was vapid and idealistic.

This kind of thing grieves me and we have a lot of it across the land. Almost certainly we will gain our freedom in Christ in the modern church only through suffering and persecution. Preachers are going to lose their jobs. Elders are going to be removed by hook or crook. Teachers who do such innocent things as to read *Mission* or attend a Billy Graham rally will be removed from their classes. Free congregations are going to be exposed and harassed. Journals are going to be banned. New ideas are going to be thwarted. Sweet, spiritual people are going to be ignored and rejected, perhaps even excommunicated, for nothing more than being charismatic.

This is the price of freedom, this the cost of reforming the church. Some of us will have to give a lot and suffer a lot in order to gain freedom for others. So there is no reason to be surprised when such trials come. The only question is how are we to respond. Certainly not with bitterness and resentment. This only denies us of our freedom and puts

us back where we were. If we really decide to come to Jesus, then let us be like him and respond tc the church of our time as he responded to the church of his day. We change the church by loving her and dying for her. Criticize? By all means, but always with love. Criticize the church as you would your old Mother, only to help and never to destroy, and always with sweet reasonableness.

These anti-church raps are bad for the soul. They gravitate to the level where you have a bunch of disgruntled, embittered, and embattled folk who compete with each other in painting their churches scarlet. They all like to tell why they left, whether it be Baptist, Episcopal or Church of Christ, while I'd much rather hear why they have stayed and what the Lord is doing through them in their ministry of love. I like to relate to a disgruntled Baptist my gratitude that the Baptists have held out in our corrupt world and have given us the likes of Charles Spurgeon, A. H. Newman, George Truett, and Billy Graham.

This negativism pervades even some charismatic meetings. Some tongue-speakers prove that you can be pro-Spirit and anti-church. And anti-church usually means anti-preacher, anti-missions, anti-organization, and all the rest. Some can fuss about the establishment for awhile and then pray in the Spirit for awhile. And one sometimes gets the notion that such folk are thankful that they are not like other people, especially the unspiritual church crowd. One brother writes of his disappointment with the rap sessions in his area, attended by people who talk of being free in Christ, for they sometimes turn into laughing bees —laughing at preachers, at elders, at the church —and he sees more derision and condescension than tender loving care.

It is easy for anti-church raps to yield to Satan in the cultivation of self-righteousness. Those involved have often left their churches and move in the small world of their own elite group. They become super saints who are far more interested in sharing their unique experiences and enrolling others than they are in sharing their time and wealth in taking Jesus to the down-and-outs or in working for social justice in their communities.

One of my charismatic brothers would visit me on the college campus, where I was counseling with youth with homosexual problems, emotional problems, racial problems. Some girls would come to me instead of the dean, fearing they were pregnant and agonizing over what to do. I would get doctors to check them on the Q. T., and in those cases where they were pregnant I would urge them to inform their parents. My brother could walk into this kind of world with apparent indifference, showing little interest in the sticky problems of the twilight zones of a university campus. Dressed nattily and driving a sport car, he always wanted to talk about the Holy Spirit and was always ready to enroll people into his life of praise.

I am not sure that it is good for such folk to get together in what amounts to an exclusive club, exulting in their spirituality. They'd do better to team up with Quakers and clean latrines and build adobe houses. Or gather up a bunch of poor white and black kids and take them on a picnic and a movie. God likes that kind of praise too!

But in closing I must make it clear that this does not apply to all my charismatic brothers or to all prayer groups and house churches. In many such gatherings I see no such self-righteousness or negativism. For such I thank God. I would only urge that such gatherings be made as inclusive as possible. Church leaders should be invited, even if they do not come. They should be invited, lovingly, again and again, and no house church should be satisfied with only super-saints attending. Let it be a means of reaching out, of praying together *for the church.* Any negative, destructive criticism should not be encouraged. Let it be a meeting for praise, prayer and study. Let God be glorified. Let it be a Jesus rap, not any kind of *anti* rap. —*the Editor*

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Mini-Meeting Diary . . .

GULF COAST MINISTRY

I spent several days of May in Houston, Lake Jackson, and Port Arthur, and since there were events of special interest I will include an account of the trip in what has come to be a kind of mini-meeting diary. It is noteworthy that these travel notes prove to be the most popular material we publish, mainly because our readers are eager to know what is going on here and there. It may also be because our people in general hunger for the kind of fellowship and freedom that these notes bear witness to.

In Houston I addressed the Trinity Christian Church, which is the only charismatic Independent congregation I have knowledge of. Tongue-speaking is common among the members, though there was none of this in the assembly on this occasion. But there was the raising of hands and the laying on of hands, along with prayers for the sick. And there was much prayer and praise, along with some tearful testimony. They are a happy group, rejoicing in the Lord and expressing their love for each other with words of kindness and warm embraces. And they are indifferent to time, usually going well beyond the noon hour on Sunday, a common feature of charismatic meetings. They broke bread by each one going to the rail and kneeling, one or two rows at a time, where they were served in multiple cups.

This congregation has served as a refuge for some of our oppressed souls in the Church of Christ, including Berwyn Tate, my host on the occasion, who for sometime was a preacher among us.

People who have found this kind of freedom in worship have recovered a spontaneity of expression that was such a vital part of primitive worship and yet so elusive in the modern church. A brother felt free to relate what the Lord did for him during the week, while a sister did not hesitate to stand at her seat and request prayer for her neighbor —and this during a service that is following some structure. One brother came to me after the service and asked that I lay my hands on him and pray for him, which of course I gladly did.

That Sunday evening I visited with the Bering Drive Church of Christ, which is now in the exercise of finding a new minister, now that Ron Durham is leaving to join the editorial staff of Sweet Publishing Co. in Austin. Bering must surely have some of the most beautiful souls on earth, and I am not sure that the congregation deserves the reputation it has in some quarters of Houston of being snobbish. “They are looking for a *name* preacher,” observed one brother who sees Bering as a place where one can hear a lot of talk but not see much action. “They don’t do anything,” he insisted.

But there is an exciting “apartment ministry” at Bering, though perhaps only partly funded by the congregation, which involves upwards of a score of folk, mostly young people. Much of this activity centers around the apartment of Margaret Williams, who is approaching retirement age as a schoolteacher, for through her tender loving care she attracts youth like honey attracts flies. The purpose of the ministry is to provide spiritual companionship for working girls, young couples who feel lost upon moving to a big city, and youth in general who like to get together and rap about Jesus. A number of them live together in the same compound, and they are out to take the place for the Lord. I immensely enjoyed a visit with a number of them, and I am impressed with their concept of a broader ministry. Bering also maintains apartments for folk who need temporary quarters while visiting their loved ones in Houston hospitals, an act of love that has made the burden of prolonged illness less difficult for many a soul. Some Christian Church people saw the good that this was doing and asked if there wasn’t something they could do to help. Margaret likes to tell how they volunteered to redecorate the apartments, adding those special touches that make for one’s comfort. Isn’t that fellowship at a very exciting level? But the thought I had is how some fellow must feel who has left his work to come to Houston to stay with his wife during the long ordeal of delicate surgery, perhaps long since fed up with the hollow claims of religionists, who has a nice apartment proffered him by Christians, and at no cost to him. Something like that can touch the heart.

While in Houston I visited with Max R. Gaulke, who is president of the Gulf Coast Bible College, a subscriber to this journal. The college is a Church of God institution, with headquarters in Anderson, Ind., a fellowship of some 2200 congregations and 300,000 members. Unlike some denominations that are generally identified with them, these folk are *not* pentecostal. Indeed, the college recently excused two students who had charismatic experiences and who showed too much eagerness to share it with others. They are also like us in that they insist that they are not a denomination and they are working for "a restoration of New Testament Christianity."

Max and I soon discovered that we had much in common, that we were kindred spirits, and that we were in Jesus together. He impressed me with his knowledge of Alexander Campbell and by his description of a visit to the Central Church of Christ where he heard Danny Anders. He introduced me to several of his faculty, and before I knew it I had spent most of a day talking to these fine people. One professor, impressed with how much his folk and mine had in common, pointed to one difference: "We do believe in a holy and exemplary life, Our people do not smoke …"

You see, people *do* notice the way you live!

Max Gaulke and I decided that we should have a mini-unity meeting between our folk. He is going to invite 12 people from the Church of God and I will invite 12 from the Church of Christ, all from the Houston area, and we are going to have two days of mutual sharing, exploring our differences and taking some step toward preserving the Spirit's unity. This will be in July, but it will not be advertised and will be by invitation only. I suggested this course as best for our initial dialogue. If something more public should emerge from this, the Lord will lead.

Max, who is nearing retirement, is a gentle soul, one who is inclined by both nature and Spirit to seek peace with all God's people. He was convinced, as was I, that the Spirit had brought us together, that our meeting was not just happenstance. He prayed for me before I left, and I don't know that anyone has ever prayed more beautifully for me and my work than he. I think maybe a tear or two got away from me, and as I walked from his office I was reminded all over again of the folly of division. "What a terribly bad habit it is," I thought, "that keeps God-loving people like his and mine as separated as if they lived in different countries."

In Lake Jackson I was in the home of Dr. and Mrs. J. D. Mays, who were, by the way, our first *medical* missionaries. And I think Africa did something real for Jerry and Shirley, for they have been honed by the Spirit through various trials into as beautiful souls as one could ever expect to meet. Jerry is a specialist in family medicine, a new field of specialization in medical science, and will soon be instructing young doctors in this area at Baylor Medical Center in Houston. Here are wonderfully dedicated people who are a great blessing to the world as well as to the church, but it just wouldn't do to reveal how the

church can maltreat and misunderstand such people. It is to their credit that they can stay on board the old ship Zion and keep praying and hoping and working for a freer and more spiritual brotherhood. The Lord will give them victory, believe it.

In their home I met with some 30 brothers and sisters, most of them on the youthful side of life, who have been put through the wringer of Church of Christism. They have had it, and they were full of those questions that I find it hard to answer. “When conditions are as we have described, should we start a new congregation?” And what do you do when preachers talk about you from the pulpit and when elders obstruct any effort toward growth and freedom, even to the point of telling you whom you can have in your home?

I just can’t bring myself to encourage people to leave where they are and start another congregation, even when the reasons seem to justify it. The scriptures do not support this kind of solution. As bad as some of those seven Asian churches were, or the one at Corinth, they were still the Body of Christ, and the apostles and the Lord still honored them as such. Even the Sardis church, which Jesus referred to as *dead,* was the Lord’s Body, and in it were those that had not soiled their garments. “They shall walk with me in white,” Jesus promised. They didn’t have to leave and be part of a *loyal* church in order to have that promise.

But I do understand how oppressive some churches can become, and this is why I encourage house meetings and prayer groups, where some joyful fellowship is possible. But those who oppose such meetings should be invited, whether they accept or not. It should all be above board and positive, and not be allowed to degenerate into gripe sessions against the institutional church. And, yes, they should be held even if elders do object, for elders do not have that kind of control over people’s lives.

And we must pray more. And allow the Spirit to overflow our hearts more and more with his fruit of love. Love is the great dynamic. Even in the most oppressive situation we must believe that love will conquer when nothing else will. Love the preacher that chides you from the pulpit and pray fervently for him in these house gatherings. Pray for the elders that want to keep you in sectarian confinement, not just once, but again and again. And believe that the Lord will act. Look for a miracle, and the good Lord knows it will take a miracle to move the troubled hearts of some of our leaders. But herein lies the only real answer. Leaving can be like a broken tooth, and it can take from you the blessing of being a conqueror through Christ. To one church that the Lord described as “wretched,” there was the promise “He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne” (Rev. 3:21).

Now in the end, when the race has been run and the battle fought, when you are there with the Lord on his throne, will it really matter what some preacher said about you or how much elders persecuted you? To be sure, those who sit with the Lord in victory will be battle-scarred —scarred, not scared!

Then, too, if you leave you won't be around for the victory celebrations, which are already being enjoyed here and there. And once more, if you leave where will you go? What we *really* seek is deep inside all of us. When we find that, in the Lord, all that is untoward will somehow fit together. We surely will not find it in some other church, not even in a new one.

I am in agreement with those wise words from John R. W. Stott, which speak so dynamically to the problem so many of our people face:

"Do you belong to what is sometimes called 'a dead church', and you are tempted to leave it and to go elsewhere? Why not heed this word of Christ? Let the revived Christians come together to pray and to wait upon God. A dynamic minority of living and awakened Christians can by prayer and love preserve a dying church from utter extinction." *(What Christ Thinks of the Church,* p. 91)

From Lake Jackson I drove a rental car along the coastal highway to Galveston and on to Port Arthur, a route that was new to me, especially the ferry ride across Galveston Bay. The great Gulf was always in view and usually only a stone's throwaway, and that Wednesday a.m. I had that lonely strip mostly to myself. I pulled off the road two or three times along the way to walk in the sand, gather shells, and watch boats of many descriptions doing their various things. The sea fascinates me beyond words. It has a mystique about it, demanding reverence from all who confront her. Like a raging storm, which I delight to watch from a comfortable vantage point, the sea speaks of God's judgment as well as His grace. Now if I can one day witness a storm at sea that would be it!

In Port Arthur I addressed a Wednesday evening gathering of one of our great congregations, the Proctor Street Church of Christ. Since the elders are interested in having a unity meeting of some nature in their area, I was asked to talk about unity and some of my attending experiences. That is about like punishing brer rabbit by throwing him into the briar patch. I *reluctantly* consented' I also met in the home of Mrs. Helen Berg for further consultation, a session made all the more challenging by dissenting voices.

I was the guest of Ike and Dorothy Summerlin, who have given "the world and the church a magnificent family. Five of their six children are now through school, all but one taking advanced degrees, and they are all contributing to the betterment of mankind, some of them with great financial sacrifice. One daughter is married to William Martin, a Harvard Ph.D. who is now at Rice and one of our better writers and researchists. Another daughter is married to Michael Weed, who already has an enviable record as an editorialist with the Sweet Co. and is an effective minister of the Word. But the girls themselves are ministers in an important sense, with impressive records as writers. The sons are in business and social work, greatly committed to the enhancement of man. What a beautiful story, and Ike and Dorothy are justly thankful for their blessings.

Dorothy is a teacher of many years and all who know her praise her. Ike is the kind of elder you read about in the Bible, and for forty years the leaven of his wise and loving leadership has been at work with the saints in Port Arthur, while he has made his living charting the course of oil tankers as an executive for Texaco. He is a trustee for ACC and for *Mission* magazine. He knows people, especially preachers, and we would all benefit by his wise and benevolent counsel. If you ask him about rearing a family, he will soon talk about family devotions, which he admits to be the most difficult thing in the world to do in our busy world, but which he and his did. —*the Editor*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Sometime back I shared in a program with the Chapel Hill Church of Christ, which meets near the campus of the University of North Carolina. A congregation in Charlotte sent a letter of protest to Chapel Hill for having me around since "It is evident from his actions that the truths of God are being set aside and that he is attempting to lead the church into fellowship of error and denominationalism." The Charlotte brethren insisted that they are committed to the defense of the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

In a business meeting the Chapel Hill folk responded with the following letter, penned by Dr. Edward G. Holley, head librarian at the university, which we think deserves a place in the record of these exciting days. It expresses the sentiment of an increasing number of our people and congregations.

> Although we understand why you feel the way you do about our program with Dr. Leroy Garrett, we nonetheless were honored to have him speak to our congregation and suggest that in our strife-torn society a messenger of reconciliation should be received in the same spirit. We are sorry that you feel the truths of God are comprised by such meetings, for we believe that we are no less committed to the defense of the Christian faith than you are. Our basic posture is to accept baptized believers on the basis of their commitment to Christ and to allow them the freedom to interpret the scriptures for themselves. This seems to us in line with the basic Restoration plea: in faith unity, in opinion freedom, in all things love. We leave the final judgment to God and trust in His grace to redeem us from whatever errors of judgment we make.

But to show that our work is still cut out for us, there is this letter, written by our folk in St. Marys, Ga., to our Independent Christian brothers who had by chance sent an advertisement to them about their program and materials.

> Dear Sirs: We received your ad today. We are not interested in any of your material for the following reasons:
>
> 1. We have no fellowship with denominational groups.
> 2. Your organization advocates:
>   1. Instrumental music in the worship of God.
>   2. Missionary societies.
>   3. Calling of preachers names such as “Reverend.”
>   4. Fellowshipping anybody and every body.
>   5. Unfortunately, rather than coming closer to the truth on the above mentioned unscriptural matters, you apparently are getting further away.
>
> The only dialogue that we desire to have with your organization is public debate to expose the error which you espouse. If you are interested, please notify us.

Albert J. Menendez, writing in *Church and State*, raises the question as to who is responsible for the tragic religious war that has long cursed Northern Island. Part of the blame must be shared by the churches, he insists, for its leaders have opposed all efforts toward integrated education, wanting children separated along sectarian lines so that they could better control them. For over a century efforts have been made to put both Roman Catholic and Protestant children in the same classroom, with no lines drawn as to who teaches them. This has been opposed by both sides, choosing sectarian education instead. A religious war has resulted. Even taxis are unsafe. Playgrounds are locked on Sundays. A casual walk about town is impossible. Cars are searched for bombs. People are immigrating to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. There were 121 assassinations last year alone. British troops struggle in vain to maintain a peace that the churches have long rejected, continuing a bitter hostility toward each other.

All this not only points to the blessings of separation of church and state, but it underscores the insanity of sectarianism. What is a public embarrassment to Christianity around the world in Ulster, has transpired countless times on a private level in homes and churches everywhere, separating families and turning neighbors into enemies. Oh, for the sweet, peaceful balm of the Spirit!

A Jew, an atheist in fact, has written a book on *My Brother Paul.* While most Jews have seen the apostle as the chief apostate who really authored Christianity, for Richard Rubenstein he is one who embarked upon a spiritual pilgrimage similar to his own. Shattered by the death of his young son, Rabbi Rubenstein, like Paul, found it futile to turn

to the law for an answer. Unlike Paul, the Rabbi, driven to atheism, turned to psychoanalysis, and it is here that he found self-acceptance. But Rubenstein sees something real in Paul's reliance upon Christ. By Jesus living within him Paul was able to accept the authority of his own experience.

If a Jewish atheist can find this kind of kinship with Paul without really becoming a believer, it is understandable that so many Jews these days are looking to Jesus as their Messiah. Many Jews are a part of the charismatic movement and the Jesus kids, so many in fact that the American rabbinate has had meetings to determine what to do about the crisis in Judaism of so many of its youth turning to Jesus while continuing to be Jews.

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RESTORATION REVIEW is published monthly, except July and August, at 1201 Windsor Dr., Denton, Texas, on a second class permit.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: Two dollars a year, or two years for 3.00; in clubs of five or more (mailed by us to separate addresses) 1.00 per name per year.